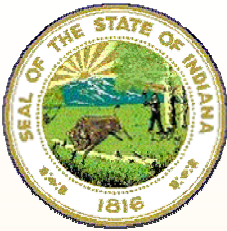


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Dear Friends:

The first regular session of the 114th Indiana General Assembly contained both accomplishments and disappointments for all Hoosiers. The most important issue considered this year was the establishment of a new state budget for the next two years. Contained in House Enrolled Act 1001, the \$24.3 billion appropriations plan is said to balance the state's budget without increasing any statewide taxes. However, my greatest concern is that the plan balances the state budget at a very high cost to public schools around the state.

One reason I voted against this budget is because it cuts funding to 142 school corporations across the state, while it potentially raises local property taxes by as much as \$850 million and simultaneously places a freeze on state property tax relief.

Under the budget's new school funding formula, only 1 percent of additional funding is provided for schools in the first year of the biennium and 1.1 percent in the second. This is well short of the 2.75 percent schools will need to keep up with inflation and the costs associated with enrollment growth.

This budget and school funding formula will mean laying off thousands of teachers, larger class sizes, fewer opportunities for expanded curriculums and less of a chance for our public schools to cope with the burden of unfunded state and federal mandates that are continually placed on them.

The budget also fails to adequately fund state universities, which in turn will cause tuition costs to rise. It underfunds the projected growth in Medicaid costs and reduces funding dedicated to local communities for road improvements and other infrastructure projects.

Although I was very disappointed with the outcome of the state budget, several important initiatives were enacted and are discussed inside this newsletter. If I can provide you with more information on issues considered by the legislature or assist you with problems or concerns you have relating to state government, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Samuel Smith Jr.

Regional development

One of my most important accomplishments this session was the establishment of the **Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (NIRDA)**.

The NIRDA will work to create a unified transportation system for Lake and Porter counties. Included in **HEA 1120**, the authority will focus on the development and funding for the expansion of the Gary/Chicago International Airport, extension of the area's commuter rail system and implementation of a coordinated bus system throughout the region.

Other plans include shoreline and economic development capital projects capable of producing tremendous growth and thousands of job opportunities for Northwestern Indiana.

In the classroom

HEA 1001 includes a provision that changes the age cutoff date for kindergarten enrollment from July 1 to August 1. Beginning in 2006, children who are age five on or before August 1 will be eligible to enroll in kindergarten.

Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, **SEA 200**

provides that all students entering high school will be required to take the Core 40 curriculum. This includes additional math and science classes that will be required to be admitted to a state-operated four-year college or university. Students would be allowed to opt out of Core 40 with parental permission

and be eligible to obtain a general diploma.

Maintaining a safe and productive environment in Indiana schools is addressed under **SEA 285**. The bill combats school violence and will help educators identify and prevent bullying. This act legally defines bullying as repeated hostile acts over a period of time, requires

that all Indiana school corporations implement safe-school committees and provides statewide training opportunities to help teachers and administrators prevent and intervene in bullying situations.



At the polls

Changes to Indiana's election laws

Several changes were made to Indiana's election laws that will be in effect for the next election in May 2006.

More restrictions on absentee voting have been put in place under **SEA 15**. The bill provides that when applying for an absentee ballot voters will have to state the specific reason for voting absentee and have a reasonable expectation of being unable to vote during the entire twelve hours the polls are open.

Under **SEA 483**, voters will now be required to show government-issued photo identification to be allowed to vote. If a voter cannot produce identification at the polls, they may vote a provisional ballot, which is a ballot that is set aside and may be counted as long as proper procedures are followed. To have the provisional ballot counted, the voter must appear before the county election board before the Monday following the election and present proper identification. If the voter does not have an accepted photo ID because the voter is indigent, the voter can sign a document attesting to this and have their ballot counted. However, if the voter does not provide the appropriate documentation to the county election board, the provisional ballot will not be accepted. The ID requirement is waived for nursing home residents who vote at a polling place within the nursing home.

Valid identification includes a state issued drivers license, an ID card issued to those who do not drive, a passport or a military identification. No alternative forms of ID will be accepted.

SEA 483 also requires the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to provide a free ID card to an individual who does not have a drivers license and will be 18 years old by the next election. **HEA 1407** requires all full-service license branches to be open on the day before an election and on election day to issue drivers licenses and ID cards to ensure voters are able to obtain proper identification.

Under **SEA 419**, military and overseas voters will be able to email their ballots through a program being administered by the U.S. Department of Defense. These voters will also be able to submit a single application by fax that would serve as both voter registration and an absentee ballot application.

Protecting our families

Legislation to help Hoosiers stay safe



The General Assembly enacted several bills this year that will help to protect Hoosier families. **SEA 12** creates the “Code Adam” alert program. Named after Adam Walsh who was murdered following his abduction from a shopping mall in

1981, this act requires the establishment of an alert system to locate a missing child in a state facility.

SEA 230 adds registered neighborhood associations to the list of organizations that must periodically receive the sex and violent offender directory published by the Criminal Justice Institute.

SEA 538 requires the state to improve its lead poisoning reporting, monitoring and preventive procedures. The legislation creates new measures to better evaluate Medicaid’s screening of children for lead poisoning. The State Board

of Health will adopt rules for case management of children with lead poisoning and to coordinate lead poisoning outreach programs with social service organizations.

SEA 444 targets Indiana’s growing methamphetamine problem which is the fastest growing drug threat in the country. The damage caused by the abuse of this drug affects families, neighborhoods, schools and the environment.

The act will make it more difficult for users to obtain necessary ingredients to “cook” the drug by restricting the sale of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine products found in cold medicines. Customers will be required to provide a photo ID and signature upon purchase and the act limits the amount of products consumers can purchase.

Meth is an especially difficult drug to combat as nearly every ingredient can be bought at your average retail store.

Smith’s initiatives become law

Most new laws become effective July 1

The following list includes several of my key initiatives that were approved by the Indiana General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor.

I am very proud to have been able to work together with other Northwest Indiana legislators, Congressman Visclosky and Governor Daniels in establishing the **Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority** (discussed in greater detail under “Regional Development” on Page 2).

I am also pleased to report that I helped to develop an initiative that will **lower the property tax burden for Lake County homeowners**. Legislation was approved which contains a 2 percent property tax cap or “circuit breaker.” The measure will limit property taxes to a maximum of 2 percent and must be approved by the county fiscal body.

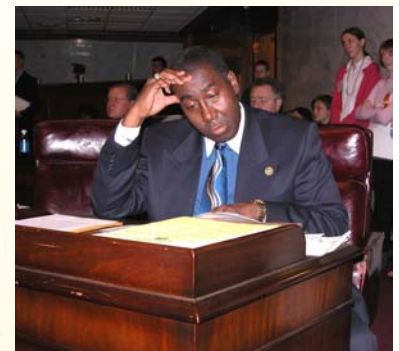
DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

The General Assembly approved legislation requiring all of Indiana to observe Daylight Saving Time. Lake County will continue to observe Daylight Saving Time, but will now be an hour behind Indianapolis year round.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has been petitioned to review Indiana’s time zones and the petition requests that Lake County continue to observe the Central Time Zone (same as Chicago).

SEA 66 prohibits the Office of Medicaid Policy or the office’s managed care contractor from providing incentives or mandates that direct certain individuals to specified hospitals other than the hospital located in the city where the patient resides.

SEA 304 provides tuition relief to the children and spouses of Indiana National Guard members who are killed on active state duty. Qualified survivors would be exempt from payment of tuition and other mandatory fees at state colleges and universities. An individual’s eligibility for the tuition exemption would be vested exclusively with the Indiana military department.



Senator Smith reviews legislation being presented to the State Senate.



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State Information TDD 800-743-3333
Indiana Senate 800-382-9467
Governor's Office 317-232-4567

Human Services

Adult Protective Services 800-992-6978
Child Protective Services 800-562-2407
Victim Assistance Hotline 800-258-0993
Consumer Protection 800-382-5516
No Call List 888-834-9969
Hammond WorkOne 219-933-8332
Gary WorkOne 219-981-1520

Community Action Agency

(Coordinates energy, housing & other assistance for
low-income Hoosiers)

Northwest Indiana Community Action 219-937-3500

Area Agency on Aging

(Provides case management, information & referral services
for persons who are aging or developmentally disabled)

Northwest Indiana Community Action 219-937-3500

Health

Senior Health Insurance Help 800-452-4800
Long Term Care Complaints 800-246-8909
Family Health Helpline 800-433-0746
Medicaid Hotline 800-457-4584
Medicare Hotline 800-633-4227

Online Services

BMV Express

www.in.gov/bmv/bmvexpress/

Assistance with prescription drugs

www.in.gov/fssa/hoosierx/

www.rxforindiana.org/

Search college grant and award information

www.in.gov/ssaci/

Get state forms

www.in.gov/icpr/webfile/formsdiv/catchoic.html

Business assistance

www.Biz.IN.gov

Get hunting, trapping and fishing licenses

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